

Tea War: A History of Capitalism in China and India. Andrew B. Liu. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020. 360 pp. \$50. Hardcover ISBN: 9780300243734.

Andrew B. Liu's *Tea War* is a thoroughly engaging global and comparative history of the tea trades of China and India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Not only does Liu show how the histories of China, India, and capitalism in the era were all bound together, he also provides a thought-provoking account which hints at how scholars might reconsider the history of capitalism from the perspective of rural or "traditional" Asian peripheries which were brought into global competition through their links to major commodity trades. In this sense Liu's work represents both a renewed interest in the history of global capitalism in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, and, by bringing together hitherto isolated literatures on China and India, it also represents a maturing of the field of Global History.

Readers will be familiar with the history of the tea trade in which British consumers' insatiable thirst for Chinese tea was supplied by British traders who raised the funds for tea purchases by selling opium in China. Conflicts over the opium trade and the difficulty in finding alternative goods to trade in China eventually prompted British prospectors to establish tea plantations in India, particularly in the Assam region, which by the turn of the twentieth century had firmly usurped the position of Chinese tea in world export markets. Liu's work does much more than trace the familiar story of the trade which has hitherto been told in primarily national frameworks. Instead, Liu deliberately transcends national boundaries and firmly locates his study in the context of global capitalism and the intense competition that this entailed. The title *Tea War* itself reflects this and the fact that contemporary discussions of the tea trade in India and China were permeated by military metaphors and ideas of economic conflict, including the notion that the British tea plantations established in India were seeking to annihilate the Chinese tea monopoly. In China economic competition in the marketplace seeped into debates about civilizational decline, whilst in India the dependence of the industry on seasonal indentured labor fed into (anti-)imperial politics.

Some may question whether the production of an agricultural product subject to limited processing prior to its sale is a significant lens through which to view the impact of an emergent global capitalism on Asia in the nineteenth century. However, as Liu shows, tea cultivation and processing was a major employer, though organized in very different ways in both countries, and though scholars of capitalism have typically focused on mechanized urban industries such as textiles, many countries experienced the rise of global capitalism as primarily agricultural societies which exported a limited number of primary products. In this way Liu's study provides a corrective to studies that have taken Euro-American notions of capitalism (or perhaps more correctly industrial capitalism) for granted, assuming that convergence along the lines of the first-movers was inevitable. The departures of the Indian and Chinese experiences from the Anglo-Saxon "norm" mean there is some inconsistency on Liu's application of the term capitalism. But that inconsistency is a strength as it allows Liu to show deftly how pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production, particularly in the labor market, existed alongside each other. Liu highlights, for ex-

ample, how unfree labor, i.e., indentured (India) and seasonal rural labor (China), played a key role in global capitalist production systems, and in so doing shows that the proletariat-type of labor was not characteristic of all regions that were intensively brought into capitalist production networks in the nineteenth century.

Liu also shows how pre-capitalist or traditional elements were incorporated into the production process which was increasingly driven by global market competition and capitalist accumulation. In China, for example, labor time management in tea processing was organized according to the time it took to burn incense sticks, a long-standing practice. Whilst in India, modern large-scale tea plantations built from scratch by British capital in the remote Assam region faced a pronounced labor shortage. This was solved by utilizing unfree labor contracts which borrowed from pre-capitalist English traditions. The above examples are just a few of the many cases in which Liu makes us rethink global capitalism from the perspective of peasants producing commodities for the world market. In this way the work thoroughly challenges the hitherto Eurocentric history of capitalism field that, though global in ambition, has in practice been dominated by studies of the United States and Europe.

Though I personally would have liked Liu to incorporate other tea exporters such as Japan and Indonesia into his study, in showing the mutual influence of two peripheries of the global capitalist economy Liu's work is both highly original and commendable. In the way he has both transcended area studies and challenged conventional notions of global capitalism, Liu has provided a blueprint for other scholars to do the same in other areas and on other commodities.

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